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INAUGURAL ADDRESS

OF

WILLIAM L. HARDING

GOVERNOR OF IOWA

TO THE

Thirty-Seventh General Assembly  
and the people of Iowa

Des Moines, January 11, 1917

Published by  
THE STATE OF IOWA  
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## GOVERNOR'S INAUGURAL ADDRESS

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WILLIAM L. HARDING

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*Members of the Thirty-Seventh General Assembly and  
Fellow Citizens:*

In a spirit of humility and reverence, the duties and responsibilities of Chief Executive of this commonwealth are today assumed. Mindful of personal limitations, aid and counsel of the Eternal Builder of the Universe is earnestly sought. The confidence of the electorate, so generously bestowed, is gratefully acknowledged.

In assuming this first responsibility, and in performing this first, and pleasant, duty, I trust I shall not lose sight of the fact that I am speaking to a co-ordinate branch of the government, wisely protected, in the performance of its functions, from undue influence, and interference, by its peers. In what I shall say, therefore, I do not presume to outline a complete legislative program, but to voice, as best I may, as the representative head of the whole people, my conception of how we may best accomplish that which will redound to the benefit and happiness of the whole people.

There are not here, as in many commonwealths, natural geographical, or artificial trade, conditions, by force of which one section of the state is arrayed in interest against others. We are a homogeneous people, with no problem or condition in any section, or among any class, which does not exist equally in all; and legislative action, for the benefit of any interest in the state, need work no injury to the whole people.

In the wealth of material things, we are rich beyond belief; an empire of thriving cities and smiling farms, and of its wealth, and of the happiness and future of its people, you are the chosen guardians. In your action lies the possibility of opening higher fields of endeavor, in which shall ripen the golden grain of individual effort into a glorious harvest of social justice.

Government is not an ideal, but a necessity, and representative government was instituted among men for the purpose of protecting

the individual in the enjoyment of the fruits of his toil and skill, and for carrying, by united effort, common burdens too heavy for individual strength.

Governments may properly notice economic conditions which exert such pressure of material necessity upon the individual that he has no real choice as to the conditions under which he shall labor for his bread. In the past, we have made legislative effort to afford men a safe place in which to work. Might we not well look to see if we may, by the same means, afford him and his family a decent place in which to live? We have said by law that the rent for money cannot justly be more than 8 per cent; that its use can have no greater value than that. Why should we permit this same money, invested in a shack, to produce 100 per cent in rent for its use? We spend millions to care for the derelicts these places launch, but we do practically nothing to prevent the conditions which produce them.

The home is the rock upon which the whole structure of society rests. If it shall be driven, by greed, to the hovel and the tenement, none shall be safe from the plague which will rise, and spread, from those depths.

We have done something in a related matter. The spread of tuberculosis has been checked, but not stopped, by the machinery which was employed against it a few years since. The existence of this disease, both human and bovine, is a serious menace to health and property, the extent of which it would not be proper to enlarge upon here. I would urge upon you that you be selfishly generous in appropriating funds to carry on the work of eradication; taking care, however, that no elaborate machinery, or new functionaries, shall be created, and that no color be given for petty oppressions or arbitrary action.

By operation of law, you have before you a proposed amendment to the Constitution, prohibiting the manufacture and sale of intoxicating liquors.

By token of the platforms of the political parties of the State, in one of which all of us have membership, we are pledged to a submission of this amendment to a vote of the people.

I recommend that you proceed at once to take such steps as shall insure the submission of this amendment to such a vote.

I urge upon you, in this connection, the gravity of the matter, involving, as it does, the fundamental law of the commonwealth, and that you surround the passage of this amendment through your



body, and its submission to the people, with every safeguard and precaution necessary to avoid any technical defect or irregularity, and to secure a free and fair expression of the will of the people.

Recent events have demonstrated our total lack of preparedness to withstand assault from without. Every male citizen, without reference to his station in life, should be made to understand that he has a duty to his country, and should be trained to perform that duty well. The burden of defense should not rest wholly on the shoulders of those who shall volunteer, nor should we depend upon that accident to secure the training necessary to discharge that burden efficiently. Might it not be possible to make our present common school system the agency by which this may be accomplished, in connection with the National Guard, which should be preserved?

The fires of patriotism cannot be lighted too early nor fed too frequently. Might not the public school system adopt a course by which the impulses, which make efficiency in this respect a glad duty, would be inculcated in the breasts of the youth?

It has been seriously proposed by some that the primary principle be abandoned by this commonwealth, and that election laws embodying that principle be repealed. The same proposal has been made touching the same principle as applied to the non-partisan selection of the judiciary.

When the Fathers drew the Declaration of Independence and framed the Constitution, upon which our liberties rest, they declared a new confidence in the individual, and in the capacity of the average man to have his share of power and responsibility in framing the laws of his government, and in choosing the men who should administer them.

Since those great days in the history of freedom, every piece of machinery which has been designed to enlarge that participation by the people, has justified itself, by the capacity which it has developed in the people for its employment to that end, and the force of public opinion is a vital one in just the degree that such machinery has been developed for its exertion.

The primary principle is fundamental. By it, the unit for the expression of public opinion has been reduced from the mass meeting to the individual, and no man's voice need be drowned by the crowd. His right to be heard, and to be counted, has been transferred from the will of the presiding officer to the quiet protection of the ballot box, and this right to be so heard in the preliminary

selection accomplished by the primary is as sacred to the individual, and as valuable to the commonwealth, as the major right of suffrage.

The arguments for repeal are fundamental, and of great antiquity. Their base is the distrust which the Tory of all ages has felt of the populace. That feeling has made war upon every enlargement of the franchise. It is the essential belief of those who hold that the people must be trusted, that a confession that they cannot be is a confession that our form of government is doomed. This does not assert that the people make no mistakes, but that they learn to use power rightly by being given it to use.

The use of the primary will better it. Even now, there speaks for its retention, one great fact which outweighs all objections made—that it is better for the State, that those who administer its affairs cannot know with dangerous exactness where their redeemer liveth—that he is best guarded against giving what he has in trust, to satisfy a sense of obligation, who is obliged to unknown thousands.

If you shall feel, as I do, that the preservation of this principle is vital, I am sure you will, no more than I, hear with patience, pleas for saving money by abolishing the machinery by which it is given play.

No saving of money which involves curtailing the liberty and power of the individual citizen is an economy.

A statement that one favors "good roads" is no contribution to political thought, and no guide to solving the problem of how best and most economically to get them. We all want the best roads we can pay for. We all want every dollar of our money to produce a dollar's worth of permanent betterment in road conditions.

In the recent campaign which has resulted in our occupying our respective stations in the public service, one issue was dominant, and the voice of the people as to it had no uncertain tone. That issue was whether the state, or any of its governmental divisions, should enter into any long-time indebtedness, under any guise, for extensive work in experimental road building. The verdict of the electorate was unmistakably against any such course, and for making our road improvements out of funds previously raised by normal taxation, and in such manner and to such extent as should be determined by those who must furnish the money to pay for them.

To the extent that I have power in my office, it shall be employed in all legitimate ways to enforce this program for which I believe the people have spoken—and I hope for your co-operation.



There are honest differences as to the details of the legal machinery which shall be employed to that end, and the adjustment of these differences is essentially a legislative function, to be performed by you without interference by the executive, unless your adjustment of them shall violate these principles, to which I conceive this administration to be pledged.

With this thought, I am content to leave this problem, for the present, for your patriotic endeavor, and with confidence that it will be solved by you with a decent regard for the convictions of the people whose servants you are, rather than by consulting the dictum of theorists and irresponsible publicists, whose inspiration is less a secret than a scandal.

Congress had appropriated moneys from the Federal Treasury, to be used, under certain conditions, by states and smaller governmental divisions for the improvement of highways, and these funds may be secured by the states, or its agencies, when they shall have raised for themselves certain other sums, to be applied upon the same work. This is called "Federal Aid." In my opinion it is a form of lottery for the extraction of money from the pockets of the people, under conditions only temporarily painless. It is a sedative, administered to the taxpayer, under the influence of which he pays for the prize out of his own pocket.

To the extent that permitting our public agencies to participate in the distribution of these funds is an encouragement to further activities of this sort by the Federal government, or by the state, accepting such aid is a dangerous expedient, while not availing ourselves of it involves the patent injustice of contributing to a fund from which we get no benefit. Our choice, therefore, lies between two evils, and I trust to your wisdom to choose a course in this respect which will not lend encouragement to this wasteful form of appropriation and expenditure, while securing to ourselves some crumbs from the feast we have been forced to spread.

Ours is a government of laws, and bottomed on a profound, and just, distrust of vesting large discretion in any executive officer. Least of all, should there be discretion in any one charged with the duty of enforcing the policy of the State, deliberately embodied in its statutes by its representatives in legislative assembly.

Euphonious phrases, used to qualify law enforcement, are but excuses, lacking humility, employed by those charged with sacred trust, to divert attention from their lack of courage. The term "law enforcement" cannot be qualified.

An executive officer has no proper concern with possible re-action occasioned by honest and uniform enforcement of law. To say that to enforce a law may lead to its repeal is but to say that we live in a Republic, and that the citizen is sovereign.

You will be responsible for the existence of every statute which shall be in effect when you adjourn, and as fully so as if you had enacted it originally.

The question of law enforcement rests primarily with this legislature, for, so far as it lies in the power of this administration, no officer shall usurp the power of repeal, by inaction, or resolve any doubts against the wisdom or virtue of any law which shall remain upon the statute books when you shall have adjourned.

You will be derelict in your duty, therefore, if you do not vest in those charged by the Constitution, and yourselves, with the duty of carrying your will into effect, every power necessary to discharge that duty.

The method by which you shall accomplish this is, under the Constitution, for you to determine. I have but to say that real law enforcement will be worth whatever it shall cost, and to urge you to let no false economies stand between you and the accomplishment of this prime purpose of government.

If I have any skill to read the public mind, it seems to me that men and women in every walk of life feel heavily the burden of our too many laws, and that there is practical unanimity against the tendency which has filled our statute books with hastily drawn and half-digested measures of every sort. There is a feeling that governmental activities touch the individual almost daily, in innumerable petty ways, without having produced any substantial betterment in living conditions, or in standards of conduct.

What the people of this State want is fewer laws, plainly written, easily understood, and well enforced. They expect you to reduce the number of laws; expect you to put them in such shape as that the average man may read as he runs, and patriotically obey. This is a task too large for a single session. I therefore recommend that a body be provided by this legislature, to report to the succeeding one, in harmony with this thought, their findings for action.

When our laws shall be reduced to readable limits, they will be understood, and respected, and, so, easily enforced.

In the same way, and evidenced in the same way, is a demand for reduction of public expenditures, and for economies in the expenditure of such funds as shall be necessarily expended.

They expect you to reduce the number of persons employed in governmental activity, wherever possible, and to reduce, or at least to not increase, the present burden of taxation.

Legislation during the past few years has resulted in an enlargement of the activities of the state government. There are instances in which the same powers are being exercised by representatives of the central government and by the local governing bodies. The limit of the activities of these officers should be well defined. In the interest of economy there should not be two sets of officers to perform a single function. I suggest this subject for your consideration and that you correct this condition where you find it.

Public attention has been drawn to the system by which the printing and binding for the State is being done. In my opinion, based upon some study of the matter, the present system is an improper one. It is asserted, not only that the system is wasteful and unduly costly, but that abuses of it exist, resulting in further loss to the State. I suggest that you take steps to inform yourselves thoroughly in this matter and to check any waste, and to improve the system.

There is a defect in our present system, of taxation through which an increase of valuation has resulted in putting into the public treasury millions of dollars not contemplated by the levies which produced the money.

No dollar of money can be raised by taxation in this state without your express permission and authority. You are responsible, therefore, for the total expenditure in the state, and I recommend such change in our laws in this respect as shall insure that no permission to raise money by taxation shall be given, by the legislature, to any governmental agency until the legislature shall have before it in dollars and cents the total amount of proposed and necessary expenditure to be made by such agencies. The rate of levy should be gauged by that estimate, and be required to be made upon a valuation then fixed.

The provision of our Constitution that legislative, judicial and executive power shall not be exercised by the same officer or tri-

bunal is not a mere phrase or dogma, but a fundamental principle of representative government. I recommend that you go carefully over the laws creating our various public agencies, and remedy this condition wherever you find it in any degree.

A legislative assembly is a deliberative body, and can perform real service only by a close study of existing law, in connection with such new ones as shall be proposed, and the measure of its service is not the number of bills passed, but the care with which those that pass shall be drawn and the consideration and study they shall receive before passage, and the benefit they may be to all the people. In this view, and in the present state of the public mind to which I have referred, the distinction of having introduced the most bills in this session will not be an enviable one.

The people of this commonwealth expect this legislature to do a few big things, and then adjourn. You will not, if you desire to regard the opinion of the people, be here more than seventy days.









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